

**Amendments to the Claims:**

Please amend claims 1-10 and add new claim 11 as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended). ~~A sliding~~ sliding closing element for an intermediate distributor or similar metallurgical containers, comprising a [[the]] mobile sliding plate [[(3) of]] which can be driven by means of a drive comprising a driving rod 5 [[(6)]] and a push rod [[(7)]] connected thereto, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the connection between the driving rod [[(6)]] and the push rod [[(7)]] is formed by a coupling [[(11)]] arranged between [[the]] opposite ends of the driving rod and push rod ~~two rods~~ with two coupling parts [[(12, 13)]] that 10 engage each other without play.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~sliding~~ closing element according to Claim 1, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the coupling [[(11)]] comprises ~~is formed by~~ a coupling head [[(12)]] and a coupling claw [[(13)]] that is received into the same by 5 means of form and force closure, ~~i.e. without play~~, with a wedge shoe [[(21)]] spring tensioned transversely in relation to [[the]] a driving direction of the driving rod [[(6)]] and supported against the wedge shoe [[(21)]] pressing against the coupling head [[(12)]].

Claim 3 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to Claim 2, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the coupling head ~~[[12]] comprises~~ consists of a component with a T-shaped cross-section that ~~comprises~~ includes a facing side  
5 engaging bridge ~~[[14]]~~ and an adjacent middle bridge ~~[[15]]~~.

Claim 4 (Currently Amended). A sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element ~~2, characterised in that the~~ comprising a coupling claw ~~[[13]] consists of~~ including a component with a U-shaped cross-section comprising a facing wall ~~[[16]]~~, a rear wall  
5 ~~[[17]]~~, two side walls ~~[[18, 19]]~~ and a floor plate ~~[[20]]~~, whereby the facing wall ~~[[16]] comprises~~ includes a central receiving slot ~~[[24]]~~ for ~~[[the]]~~ a middle bridge ~~[[15]]~~ of ~~[[the]]~~ a coupling head ~~[[12]]~~, ~~whilst~~ and the rear wall ~~[[17]]~~ and the floor plate ~~[[20]]~~ are equipped with support  
10 surfaces for ~~[[the]]~~ a wedge shoe ~~(21), i.e. for the springs (22a, 22b) tensioning the same.~~

Claim 5 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to Claim 4, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the wedge shoe ~~[[21]]~~ is tensioned by ~~means of~~ at least one spring

[[22a, 22b]] arranged along [[the]] a longitudinal axis of the driving rod [[6]].

Claim 6 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to Claim [[4 or]] 5, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the wedge shoe [[21]] is connected with a set screw [[25]] inserted through the centre of the floor plate [[20]]  
5 of the coupling claw [[13]], which does not contact the floor plate [[20]] during operation, so that the height of the wedge shoe [[21]] can be adjusted transversely in relation to the driving direction.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to Claim 6, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the wedge shoe [[21]] is maintainable ~~can be held~~ in position by ~~means of~~ the set screw [[25]] during coupling until the  
5 specific coupling is complete, whereas the set screw [[25]] can be screwed in further during de-coupling, whereby the wedge shoe [[21]], and with it the coupling [[11]], can be disconnected.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to ~~one of the Claims~~ Claim [[2 to]] 7, wherein ~~characterised in that~~ the abutting surfaces of the coupling head

[[ (12) ]] and the coupling claw [[ (13) ]] include ~~are equipped with~~ tapered edges [[ (30, 31) ]].

Claim 9 (Currently Amended). The sliding ~~Sliding~~ closing element according to Claim 8, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the coupling head [[ (12) ]] ~~consists of~~ includes an integrated part of the push rod [[ (7) ]].

Claim 10 (Currently Amended). A coupling ~~Coupling~~ for a sliding closing element according to Claim 1, wherein ~~one of the preceding Claims, characterised in that the same can be installed~~ coupling is installable into the sliding closing element as a  
5 construction assembly ~~consisting of~~ including the coupling claw [[ (13) ]] and the coupling head [[ (12) ]] with the integrated push rod [[ (7) ]].

Claim 11 (New). A coupling for a sliding closing element according to Claim 4, wherein the coupling is installable into the sliding closing element as a construction assembly including the coupling claw and the coupling head with the integrated push rod.